



CARING FOR VERY YOUNG KITTENS:

Kittens can easily become chilled and can actually die from being cold within a short time. Be sure that from the moment you find them, the kittens are kept constantly warm. Keep an eye out for signs of chilling (i.e., kittens are listless and feel cool to the touch). If you have nothing else on hand, use your own body heat to warm up a cold kitten, and rub gently to aid circulation. Kittens cannot control their own body temperature until they are at least three weeks old. Do not bottle feed until kittens have warmed up completely.

Here are some important tips to keep in mind if you do end up having to care for a neonatal kitten (one- to four-weeks old). Be aware that sometimes, no matter what you do, some neonatal kittens do not survive and can fade very fast. You can only try to be the best surrogate guardian possible, and hope for the best.

- Ask for Help: Contact local veterinary clinics and animal shelters to ask if they have a nursing mother cat or experienced volunteers to help you learn how to bottle-feed the kittens. People have had a lot of success having mother cats “adopt” more kittens.**
- Heat and Bedding: Kittens can easily become chilled and can actually die from chilling within a short timeframe. Be sure that from the moment you find them, the kittens are kept constantly warm. Continually keep an eye out for signs of chilling (i.e., kittens are listless and feel cool to the touch). If you have nothing else on hand, use your own body heat to warm up a cold kitten, and rub gently to aid circulation. It is important to note that kittens cannot control their own body temperature until they are at least three weeks old. Do not bottle feed until kittens have warmed up completely.**

At home, provide kittens with a soft nest (like a box or kitty bed) with a heating pad or other warming device. Completely cover it with a blanket or towel, and make sure that kittens can move away from the heat if they want. Change the bedding daily or as needed when accidents occur.

Chilling can occur after a kitten becomes wet. Never submerge kittens in water. If you need

to wash them, wash only certain parts or use a moist wash cloth. Be sure to always fully dry them with a hair dryer (on low) and towel.

- **Food:** Never feed kittens cow's milk—this causes diarrhea. Feed only kitten formula, such as KMR, which can be purchased at most pet supply stores. Use kitten bottles to feed, as they are designed specifically with a kitten in mind. If you have an option for nipples, the elongated nipples are easier to use. Follow the directions of the bottle manufacturer for bottle preparation. You may have to make your own holes in the nipple with a sterilized pin or razor; be sure you do this correctly so that the kitten replacement milk drips out slowly when the bottle is turned upside down. Sterilize the bottles before using. Wash your hands before and after each feeding.

If you find yourself with a kitten and no store is open, this emergency kitten formula can be made at home. It should only be used in emergencies, and should not replace kitten formula.

- 8 oz. can evaporated milk
- 1 beaten egg yolk
- 2 TB Karo syrup

Mix all ingredients well and strain. Warm before serving. Keep refrigerated.

From Feline Neonatal Care DVD from the Loudoun SPCA.

- **Feeding:** Hold or place kittens on their stomachs and arch the bottle so less air gets in (do not feed kittens on their backs). Always warm the kitten replacement milk and test it on your wrist to be sure it is warm but not hot. Remember, do not feed chilled kittens.

For kittens 10 days old or younger, feeding should occur every 2 hours around the clock. From age 11 days to 2½ weeks reduce feeding to every 3–4 hours. From 2½ to 4 weeks, feed every 5–6 hours. For kittens 4 weeks and older, feed 2–3 times daily with a wet food/formula mixture. Follow the guidelines on the formula label for how much to feed. Kittens will usually stop nursing when full. Weaning occurs around four to five weeks of age. Mix formula with wet food so kittens can begin to lap it up, or put the mixture in a bottle. Then mix with dry food and begin providing water.

If you are having trouble getting a kitten to “latch” onto the bottle, try pulling on the nipple when they start to suck, this will encourage her to suck harder and latch on. You can also

try moving the nipple back and forth in the kitten's mouth. If your kitten is too ill to suck on a bottle, you may have to use other methods such as tube feeding. Consult a veterinarian before attempting this yourself.

- **After feeding:** As long as kittens are eating formula, you must burp them. Put them on your shoulder or on their stomachs and pat them gently until you feel them burp. Kitten formula is sticky, so be sure to clean kittens after feeding with a warm, damp washcloth.
- **Elimination:** Kittens under four weeks must be stimulated in order to go to the bathroom after each feeding. Usually a mother cat would lick her kittens, but you can use a warm, moist cotton ball to gently rub the kittens' anal area to stimulate urination and defecation. Completely solid feces usually will not form while kittens are drinking formula.

Start litter training at four weeks. Kittens may start looking for a place to go as young as 2½ weeks of age. You may supply them with a small, shallow litter pan with non-clumping litter. Do not use paper or fabric; while this is soft, it can teach bad habits they may carry into adulthood! Show kittens the litter box and put in a used cotton ball, and this should do the trick.

Health Concerns:

Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) – Though this is common in kittens, you should not ignore it. If heavy yellow discharge develops or the kitten has trouble breathing or eating, see a veterinarian immediately. A mild URI can be cleared up by simply wiping away discharge with a warm, wet cloth and keeping kittens in a warm, damp environment.

Fleas – Fleas on a very small kitten can cause anemia. First, pick fleas off with a flea comb. For a bad infestation, you can bathe the kitten in warm water to get rid of fleas. You can also use a very small amount of gentle, liquid dish soaps such as Dawn, to bathe kittens. Avoid the eye area—use a washcloth around the face—and rinse them thoroughly. Do not use flea shampoo or topical flea treatments on kittens 6 weeks or younger. Remember, never submerge kittens fully in water. If giving a bath be careful of chilling – dry kittens thoroughly with a warm towel or hair dryer on low, then place on a heating pad.

Parasites/Diarrhea – Any drastic change in stool consistency can mean trouble. Parasites can often cause diarrhea, strange looking stools, and dehydration. Kittens can begin a deworming treatment schedule as young as 10 days old; see a veterinarian for this. If you notice any unusual signs, your kittens should be seen by a veterinarian. **Socialization**

Getting comfortable – Follow these tips to make kittens feel more at home.

- Give kittens an initial two-day adjustment period after trapping before you begin interacting with them too much.
- Set the kittens' crate up off floor so they feel more comfortable. Felines feel safer if they are higher and not at ground level.
- Move slowly and speak softly around the kittens. If you wear shoes indoors, consider slippers or socks around the kittens. Don't play loud music or musical instruments.
- Let the kittens be a part of the household action. Leave a TV or radio on after the kittens have been in your home for a few days, so they become accustomed to human voices and sounds. If exposure to other pets is not an issue, set the whole crate in a busy living room with a TV playing.
- For young kittens, a ticking clock wrapped in a towel sounds like a mother cat's heartbeat and is very soothing.
- Kittens will respond to positive experiences. Reward positive behaviors, like the kittens approaching you for attention or after a good play session, and prevent negative experiences like scolding or confrontations with other pets.
- Gauge each kitten's ability to learn and become accustomed to you. Evaluate each individually—don't go by set rules.
- Be patient! Spitting, hissing, and hiding are all expressions of fear; do not mistake these signs for aggression.
- If a litter of kittens are slow to socialize, consider separating them. Isolating the kittens forces them to rely on people. If you can't, make sure you spend quality time alone with each one. Litters can be put back together after a short adjustment period.
- Don't try to rush the socialization process. Be patient, and monitor the progress of each individual kitten

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